CHRISTIAN DRAMA

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THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION AND DRAMA

By F. N. DAVEY

THE Editor has not only printed my unguarded outburst about drama and worship in *Christian Drama* II ; he has promised his readers a full-length article from my pen in his next issue! This is doubly flattering, and doubly embarrassing. For I have to try to justify my theological indignation just when I am eagerly awaiting Mr. R. H. Ward's second instalment on what is very much the same subject.

The subject is, to be sure, a very pressing one; and I hope that readers will at any rate agree with me that discussion of it is much to be desired. With the object of stimulating such discussion I will attempt a rough and ready analysis of the problem as I see it.

Like Mr. Ward, I believe that there is no essential difference between religious drama and other sorts of drama, and I am prepared to say that, in a sense, all art (including drama) is essentially religious. But—and here, I think, Mr. Ward would differ—I believe there to be an essential difference between religion and drama, provided that by religion is meant the Christian religion.

Moreover, I believe there to be a very real difference between drama of which aesthetic experience is the end, and drama employed for a purpose beyond itself.

Let me take the latter distinction first. It is most desirable that able painters should make posters advertising the natural beauties of England, and that able musicians should provide background-music for documentary films, and that able writers should compose appeals for needy charities. Moreover, if these men perform their tasks adequately, their work must be able to stand purely artistic tests, simply as painting, music or prose. Yet they would altogether fail unless the effect of their work were, *first and foremost*, to bring tourists to this country, to propagate certain information, or to raise sums of money. Conversely, the pictures hung in the National Gallery, the music played in the Albert Hall, and the prose perpetuated in Library Editions (whatever the primary motive of their creation) have attained

their present dignity because their effect is, *first and foremost*, aesthetic. (Whatever the primary motive of their creation, I say, because it is clearly possible for a work of art whose original purpose was not primarily aesthetic to be preserved and treasured for its aesthetic value long after the end for which it was created has been forgotten.) But this consideration does not, I think, invalidate my distinction. Therefore (for instance), so long as there are worshipping Christians, M. Henri Gheon's *Way of the Cross* is to be thought of, first and foremost, as drama (very good drama) calculated to induce worship; whereas (again for instance) the Sermon in Mr. T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, although a model sermon, is first and foremost dramatic in its effect.

Now for my former distinction, that there is an essential difference between the Christian religion and drama. The late Archbishop Temple used to distinguish between aesthetic experience, in which the individual is eminently alone, although the beauty with which he is occupied is rightly thought of as revealing God, and religious experience in which the Christian is drawn into a close personal relationship with God and his fellow Christians. It is, I think, along these lines that the Christian must insist that there is such a difference between his religion and drama, although, necessarily, his argument will only satisfy other Christians. Art—even specifically Christian art—belongs to the natural order. Like the beauties of the natural creation it speaks of God by offering indirect intimations of His purpose, nature and will. But the life of the Church is supernatural, for it is direct participation in the life of God. There is, therefore, an essential distinction between the characteristic Christian acts in which the life of the Church is expressed and experienced, and the ordinary life of men in the world, even when lived by the light of Christ; even when interpreted by the specific Christian acts. The Eucharist, for instance, rightly teaches us that all life is sacramental; that, in particular, all eating and drinking can be so directed to God as to become the means of heavenly nourishment. Yet, even so, the Eucharistic Bread and Wine are essentially different from all other bread and wine, offering a communion with God and man which must be distinguished absolutely from the good-fellowship of family or club, admirable, inspiring, and illuminating though that may be.

Therefore, I would distinguish absolutely between the purpose and character of the liturgical worship of the Church and the drama, even when religious. The drama can deepen my knowledge and experience of the reality which is God's imprint upon creation. As the handmaid of Christianity it can increase my understanding of the Christian Revelation and Mysteries and so enlarge my capacity for prayer and worship. But the knowledge and experience of God in the natural order is *not* specifically Christian meditation and worship. And growth in theological or liturgical understanding is not specifically Christian meditation and worship. Accordingly, when drama is employed in Church, as it ought to be employed, in close conjunction with liturgical acts, there must, I believe, always be a point at which drama gives way to liturgy and what has hitherto been *an* audience becomes *the* congregation.

A word may be added about the impersonation of Christ. To my mind the objection to impersonation is this. The basis of the Christian faith is history, yet it is history interpreted by faith, since it is history invaded by God. It is not " a " history, but " the " history, which makes sense of all history because it reveals what is by definition non-historical. You and I are to apprehend this through our experience in history, yet, if we apprehend at all rightly, we are at once caught up " beyond history ". (This is pictured for us in the fact that when the disciples travelling to Emmaus recognized the risen Christ He immediately vanished from their sight.) For this reason the " Jesus of History " (which is all we can present by impersonating Him on the stage) pulls us down to earth just when, if we have begun to catch His *historical* meaning, He should be lifting us up to heaven; and keeps our physical eyes focussed on this side of that veil through which (if we were really looking at Him) He would cause the eyes of our soul to penetrate. And for this reason, the Body of Christ which is the Church represents for us, in its liturgical acts, the meaning of the " history " of Jesus without there being any fear of our interpreting that history as nothing more than history. The visible Church, in its liturgy, is Christ once more visible to men. And when, for liturgical purposes, the ordained minister speaks or acts on behalf of the whole Church, his office safeguards his administration and the essential acts of Christ from being misunderstood. On the stage there is no such safeguard. However great (and however devout) the actor, his words and deeds will always be liable to an interpretation restricted to the dimensions of time and space.

ELEMENTS OF RELIGIOUS DRAMA

By R. H. Ward

PART II

This is the second of a three-part article (originally a lecture) by Mr. Ward; the first part appeared in our last issue.

I suggest that it is better to present no religious drama at all than to present so-called religious drama which is both inartistic and irreligious because it has not sprung clean from the sources of all art and religion and been passed through the highly disciplined mind of a sincere and devoted artist. Now, it will be thought that I am making a plea for " highbrow " plays, that I should think any play good which was odd and new-fangled, and a masterpiece which was unintelligible. Simplicity, economy, a child-like quality, are true attributes of art, and they have nothing to do with the " highbrow ". I doubt very much whether " the highbrow " (which, if I understand the word at all, means to me something clever for cleverness' sake, but in reality entirely superficial and barren of true meaning) ever had anything to do with art or religion. Innovation is one thing, but obscurantism is

another; the one is often that very newness which is needed, the other we can dispense with, for in all probability it merely indicates an absence of truth. Nor am I saying that all religious plays must be written by great artists or even of necessity by practised hands—though religious drama deserves the practised hand and will profit by it. But I am saying that they must be written—and played, too—by men and women of integrity, devotion and sincerity, whose attitude to art is religious and whose attitude to religion is artistic.

For these two things are very difficult and responsible matters; and nothing less than what is called " putting our whole souls into it ", and our best technique, is good enough. There are men practised in writing of a somewhat superficial kind who appear to regard themselves as equipped to turn their hands to religious themes. But plays by such men are as unsatisfactory as those written by priests who have much understanding of religion, but no ability to express themselves as artists. For it will not do to think that, because one knows the story of Christ's nativity inside-out as a story, and even understands its true significance, one is capable of dramatizing it. It will not do either to think that a chorus of angels (with real wings), a few " Eastern " costumes, and characters addressing each other as thou and thee, with an occasional " Verily, verily " or " Woe is me " thrown in, make a religious play. They do not; they make for religiosity, " quaintness " and pretty-prettiness, perhaps, but I venture to doubt whether they are pleasing to God, and I know they are not pleasing to man. And it is certain that such confections, which are generally the result in fact of a superficial amateurism and sentimentality of soul, do nothing to serve the real purpose of religious drama, which is to justify the ways of God to man on the one hand and to place before us on the other, in Don Quixote's words " a mirror in which we may see vividly displayed what goes on in human life ".

It may appear that I am straying far from my two main factors in the drama, the stage and the auditorium, and the relation between these two. But it will be evident that this matter of the choice of a play bears upon the question; for the play is that which is presented on the stage and received in the auditorium. Much wise advice on the choice of play by a religious drama group will be found in a pamphlet on the subject by Mrs. Helen Lamb, published by the Religious Drama Society.

One point which it seems to me important to realize is that the religious play is not so selected and special a matter as many suppose. It will be inferred from my argument that all art, properly grounded and properly approached, is religious—that many plays which may not appear at first glance to be " religious " plays may in fact be legitimately so described. I have cited *Measure for Measure*; and not merely because part of its theme is chastity, while one of its characters seeks to enter a convent. It seems to me that a re-examination of the field of religious plays should be undertaken by those who interest themselves in them, and that a little more enterprise could be exercised in the choices dramatic groups make. It is not my business here to attempt to give lists of plays which seem to me suitable, but I am

certain that religious drama, if it is to grasp the enormous opportunity which is undoubtedly offered it at the present time, must widen its horizon where its plays are concerned. It must cease to be parochial in the pejorative sense of that word; it must cease to think that only plays which are specifically passion-plays or nativity-plays or more or less direct dramatizations of the Bible are religious plays ; what is needed is plays which carry religion into ordinary contemporary life and affairs, plays which hold the mirror up to contemporary human nature and speak directly to men and women of to-day about the things that directly and urgently concern them. Too often religious plays seem to an audience to be about events and persons belonging to a past age having no connection with our own; what is needed is a specifically contemporary approach to the unchanging truth embodied in the Christian stories and the Testaments themselves. What application, if the right angle of vision is adopted, has the sacrifice of Isaac to us whose sons are daily sacrificed in battle, what application to a world of homeless mothers and children, refugees from every sort of physical and mental torment, has the rejection of the Holy Family at the inn or its flight into Egypt. But these applications must be made plain, and stated in human terms which all can understand, whether or no they are already familiar with the Bible and with Christian teachings. Plays which merely reiterate the Christian teachings, in the terms which, magnificent though they are, the churches have used for centuries, will preach only to the converted, and it is the unconverted, those whose minds are still darkened to the essential truths which underlie human existence, who are in need of what Jung calls " rescue from whatever distress " and of being shown how " to live through even the longest night ".

Let me not be misunderstood. I am not advocating propaganda plays and I am not suggesting that it is the duty of religious drama specifically to make converts to the churches by offering to the public the churches' dogmas as the only possible expression of the truth; for a church must have no dictatorship in religion, its first duty in this matter is to strengthen free-will in the audiences who watch religious plays, and to let them choose to adhere to a church only if, once their minds have been opened to the truth, a particular church seems to them to offer the best expression of it and the best opportunity for living according to it. Christians would sometimes do well, after all, to remember that for many millions of people, Buddhism (for instance)—based upon the same essential truths as all religions in all times, from the earliest cults and mysteries to Christianity, which is still among the youngest—offers the most acceptable expression of the truth and opportunity of practising it—and this not merely because these unfortunate heathen have had no chance of embracing the Christian faith. There is a right way for all of us, and there is one ultimate God to whom they all lead. It is those unfortunate, bewildered and lost humans who have found no way, and therefore see no God at the end of it, whom it is the first concern of religious drama to enlighten and guide. If it ultimately guides them into the bosom of a Christian church, well and good, but if it guides them elsewhere yet always

towards a deeper understanding of themselves and their world and of the divine laws which uphold it, surely there will still be rejoicing in heaven.

One thing is certain, that the law of inverse effort comes into operation proportionately as propaganda does. Example is another thing; *tell* me to become a Christian and I am unmoved, but *behave* to me like one and I shall feel compelled to emulate you. Art offers examples of the truth. Propaganda is always biassed and is therefore always a form of lying. " And if the arts and religion conspire in lying," says Charles Rann Kennedy, " how is the world ever going to be saved ? " The function of art is to ask questions; that of propaganda is to answer them. The function of art is to open the mind to speculations as to the truth; that of propaganda is to close the mind to such speculation. Art asks, What is truth ? Propaganda says, This is—and lies in doing so. Man, particularly to-day, when his world and his beliefs are crashing about his ears, feels the need to ask questions, and—what is more important—feels the nascent ability to answer them for himself. It is this nascent ability that religious drama must foster, for in doing so it will foster the strong, independent, self-reliant mind which both church and state desperately need. A totalitarian government, and a complaisant church enslaved to it, will make the uses which we already know of minds which are not independent and have no strength to distinguish truth from falsehood, humanity from beastliness, or a divine imperative from propaganda. We find that all works of art—and it will be seen that it is into the realms of art, because of the untold service that art always offers to mankind, that I am striving to broaden and elevate religious drama—we find that all works of art ask a question or perhaps many questions. How many, and how pertinent, questions does a great play like Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* not ask ?—or *Macbeth* or *Œdipus Rex* or *Saint Joan* ? The answers to these questions are left to the spectator; answer them for him in the theatre, deny him the use of the mind with which as a human being he has been blessed, and he goes away with a powerful sense of frustration—if he is not simply bored. Set him examples which imply the questions: Isn't this perhaps the truth ? Isn't this a better way to live than your way ? and he leaves the theatre in the state of mind which has brought many before now to conversion. It is in this way that the arts have throughout the ages been a force leading men to the good life; in this way, as Shelley said, the poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. But what incentive to think for oneself, to grow and change within oneself, is propaganda, which takes away free-will and substitutes a set of rules and dogmas ?

Yet it seems that this is a difficult point, this profound difference between art and propaganda, for religious drama to grasp. Those who write, produce, act and generally promote religious plays are, in the nature of things, very certain that their opinions are the only right and tenable ones. What, they say, is the use of religious drama as such, if it is not to make others hold these opinions too ? Yet that is eventually its use and purpose—provided that we are not mistaken in our opinions and that they are indeed the only right and tenable ones. The point

is that conversion will not be brought about by bludgeoning the mind, or even by the most persuasive speeches; the law of inverse effort will see to that. The conversion of other minds, if it is to be a real and lasting conversion—and we all know that propaganda can achieve something as a short-term policy and will have a superficial effect—is a matter of indirect approach, of suggestion, of offering choices and asking questions which are deliberately left unanswered. This is always part of the business of art and it seems to me that it should be part of the business of religious drama. If the opinions held by its practitioners are in fact true ones, time and the mercy of heaven will see to it that it is to the holding of such opinions that the recipient of the questions will be brought by the answers with which he will be forced to furnish himself. We must have faith in our fellow men and their capacity to see the truth for themselves; faith in our own opinions has led the world into untold misery.

But it is not only the play which these remarks concern; it is also the way the play is done, the spirit and accomplishment of its performance. We must suppose that a play of some intrinsic value has been chosen, one which speaks an old truth in a new way; it remains to perform it in a way which will enhance its truth rather than obscure it. But just as I am not suggesting that all plays presented by religious drama groups must be great plays in a literary or stage-traditional sense, so I am not suggesting here that the acting and presentation of religious plays must be highly "professional" or fully experienced. In a word, I am saying that the job of the actors and the producer is to serve the play to the top of their ability. Essentially speaking, nothing more need be asked, for nothing more is required for the achievement of the heart of the matter: a sincere performance. It is, you see, the spirit of the thing of which I am speaking; get the spirit on your side, as it were, and the rest, the material business of acting, setting and costuming and lighting, will be added. Too often, even among groups which have an avowedly high and selfless purpose, there is a tendency to the service of self. Again, the artist's sense of being driven beyond himself and by a force greater than himself is necessary. The approach to the production of a religious play—indeed, of any play—must be one of a certain self-abnegation. The play is the sole purpose of a group working together; a hint, in the heart of only one actor, that he is taking part for his own sake, in order to display himself or his gifts to the public, and something is lost to the production as a whole and to its effect upon its audience.

It is from this lurking and all too human self-regard that all the blemishes of self-consciousness arise: that extravagant and in fact meaningless use of the body, that "stage-voice" (affected more particularly in the speaking of verse), that prettiness of posture and exaggeration of grimace, to which young women especially are prone on the stage. We cannot go into details of technique, but it may be said at least that stage-work is not an elaboration of ordinary life, but a simplification of it which makes it more real than actuality. Such work embodies economy, not multiplication, of movement and gesture; it demands clarity of speech and a naturalness which is more than

natural—but nothing " stagey ", nothing " theatrical ". (And here let me put in a word on behalf of plays in verse. Poetry on the stage is speech made a little more real than actuality; it heightens emotion without appearing to do so, and arrests the attention of the intellect. Poetry is, in fact, the natural tongue of the stage; you will see that all good plays, even if they are in prose, are written in a kind of poetry.) What has to be learned for the purpose of the drama is how to do naturally what is in fact unnatural; unnatural by the very nature of the theatre, as you will see if you try to transpose upon the stage, detail by detail and word by word, an actual scene from human life: no one would watch it and listen to it for five minutes. Beyond that, however, we may not discuss technique. But the word need not frighten us unduly, at least if we are amateurs, for, up to a point, all human beings are actors, and this natural aptitude is what in most cases religious drama groups will need to use; just to what immense effect it can be used, almost any performance of a play by children or unsophisticated persons will indicate.

This brings me to a quality upon which I wish for a moment to dwell; that of simplicity. Simplicity, like the sincerity with which it is of course closely allied, is a key-quality, particularly in the presentation of religious plays. How often one has seen a performance marred irrevocably because this key has never been found and used ; marred by the over-elaboration of scenery and properties and lighting, the " grandification ", in every sense, of an essentially simple situation. Once more, it is the truth we are trying to expose, and once more, the truth, when you get near enough to it, is simple. Elaboration of production obscures rather than exposes this truth; and " the nature of God ", said the late Charles Williams, " is to have everything clear." The need which so many producers of religious plays appear to feel for elaboration of setting and costume seems to indicate either the choice of a play which has not in fact a central core of truth to be exposed and so needs to be " made interesting ", or a lack of faith in both play and audience. It is tempting to suspect that an audience will not understand what is happening if there is only a minimum of scenery, costume and properties to help them. But audiences are endowed, even the stupidest of them, with imagination, and they are there to use it. Give them, therefore, the opportunity of doing so. Keep their minds interested and alive. Avoid plays with many scenes (they are almost certainly ill-constructed and could have been written in fewer); avoid cumbersome and expensive and perhaps in the end only confusing scenic decoration. Allow suggestion to do its work in conjunction with the audience's imagination; tell them that their stage at present represents the audience-chamber in Pilate's house and, with the help of a little lighting and a little acting, they will believe it and themselves enter into that which is passing in the audience-chamber. Shakespeare had almost no need of scenery; when we dress up his plays in too much of it nowadays, they mysteriously lose a great deal of their quality; the scenery is distracting our attention from the words, which give us all we need to know of locality, story and characterization. And it is in the words of a good play, also, that the truth which it is

our whole aim and object to expose is to be found. Very well, then, let us expose it, clear from it all superfluous materialism, not cover it up with flummery decorations which are essentially meaningless. Let us enunciate clearly and unaffectedly the words, and perform precisely and deliberately the actions in which the meaning is enshrined. Lope de Vega described the performances of the strolling theatre of his day as " four trestles, four boards, two actors and a passion ". It is a good starting-point.

These qualities of simplicity and sincerity will take us, more quickly than by any other road, to another essential: unity. And unity is an imaginative quality, and one which is very quickly felt on the audience's side of the footlights. It comes, I think, from a sense, possessed by all the members of a play's cast, of being essential parts of a whole greater than themselves. " Simplicity," said the great founder of the Moscow Art Theatre, Stanislavsky, " is either the result of a very poor imagination or a very rich one," and it is not the simplicity of barrenness, but that of richness of imagination towards which we must strive. A rich imagination brought by producer and actors to a simple production will endow it with a corporate life—that is, a unity—which is a very real thing indeed: it is the same unity which is the making of a painting, a symphony, any work of art, and, without it, a play will be, not a meaningful whole, but a meaningless series of disjointed parts, of actors severally parading upon a stage and having no real relation to one another or, far worse, to the story they are supposed to be telling.

In such unity there is, inevitably, great strength—strength of sincerity, of truth, of conviction—which, equally inevitably, the audience must feel; and by so much as they feel it will the play and what it has to say enter into their hearts and minds, and they in turn enter into the play—a necessity to which I shall return in a moment. Again, de Vega has a wise word; " The company of Valleo is like some faces —not a perfect feature in it, but because of the harmony with which they are united, the face is beautiful." It is a comfort, at those times when we are forced to realize that we are bad actors, of inadequate technique and experience, who cannot possibly do the play justice, to realize also that, if we can, by our simplicity and sincerity and our devotion to that play, achieve the harmony of unity, we shall still achieve something beautiful. Indeed I have seen productions, shockingly bad in some ways and from the critical and professional point of view, which were exceedingly moving and, spiritually speaking, eminently successful, because they had this mysterious quality of unity.

(*To be concluded.*)

CHRISTIAN DRAMA is the quarterly magazine of the Religious Drama Society. *President*: The Lord Bishop of Chichester. *Hon. Director*: E. Martin Browne. *Chairman of Council*: Miss Athene Seyler. *Travelling Adviser*: Miss Carina Robins. *Librarian*: Miss K. Bainbridge-Bell. *Secretary*: T. G. Bartholomew. All enquiries and applications for membership should be addressed to The Secretary, R.D.S., S.P.C.K. House, Northumberland Avenue, W.C. 2.

These notes are not for the great; but they may be of use to beginners.

ON NOT BEING A BORE

"Boring? My dear, they must have bored for England!"

If you don't want to bore your audiences when you produce your first religious drama, these are danger points to watch in your production. In no field of artistic endeavour is it truer to say that good intentions are not enough.

LENGTH

It is better to leave your audience longing for more than to keep them from their supper when their attention has flagged. Many amateur shows go on far too long; rehearsals must be relentlessly timed and if need be the play ruthlessly cut. A two-hour show is long enough for all but the really skilled company to attempt, and if the audience is not seated in comfort, an hour and a half is plenty.

VISIBILITY

Too often, especially if a play takes place in a church, only a small portion of the audience can really see well. The failure may be due to lighting or to seating difficulties, but every effort should be made to ensure that every member of the audience can see the whole stage all the time. If you can't raise the back seats you must raise the stage. Remember that, whether you like it or not, you are competing with the standard set by the cinema.

AUDIBILITY

It is an intolerable imposition on any group of people to invite them to listen to a play and then mumble it so that they can't hear. If, for reasons of youth, or lack of training, your actors cannot speak to fill the church, content yourselves with the church hall and smaller audiences till experience teaches your company to speak out; get, if you possibly can, the help of a trained voice producer, and practise what he preaches.

CONTINUITY

If a play is really thrilling and really brilliantly acted, audiences can bear to wait through a short scene-shift; but nothing kills interest more surely than long waits between scenes, and the very cogent reason for the long intervals in the commercial theatre—that the Bar may make its money—does not obtain in the performances we are considering. No "cover-uppage" of gramophone records or solo singers or any similar subterfuge is any good; the play simply dies while you wait, and the most certain success awaits the producer who chooses a play where simplicity of construction enables him to cut the intervals to a minimum.

BALANCE OF VOICE AND TEMPO

Bernard Shaw, discussing the casting of *Heartbreak House*, is reported to have said that he had "scored" the voices as for a musical production. Usually, too little attention is paid to the balance of voices, and

even if soprano, alto, tenor and bass are assembled, producers seem often unaware that their actors are catching each other's inflexions, intonations and key, so that if you shut your eyes and listen, any woman speaking might be any other woman, and any man, any one of the men.

The same is true of tempo. Watch carefully that the slow, "old-man" tempo of the grandfather doesn't infect the answering speeches of his grandson, till by degrees the play slows down to a full and irredeemable stop long after the audience has fallen asleep.

ENTRANCE, EXIT . . . EXEUNT

One producer of amateurs whose results we have long admired, tells us that she spends at least a third of the time available for rehearsal on rehearsing exit and entrance lines and another third on group and crowd movement. Wise in human nature, she affirms "they'll rehearse their own big speeches all right".

FINALLY

Don't allow too long for rehearsal. This sounds paradoxical, but if you are producing amateurs, you will find that a violent onslaught, with everyone working at breakneck speed and intensity for a month, will produce results that will astonish the producer himself. Rehearsal has a cycle of immature excitement—boredom—maturity. Let it pass the third stage and the whole thing goes soft like a sleepy pear; and from that sleep there is no awakening.

JOINING IN

We have received a letter from an R.D.S. member from which we reproduce sections because it is the sort of which we should like to receive more. It roused in us in turn agreement, shame, amusement, indignation and flat dissent; we finished it, as one finishes all good arguments, with several new ideas and the sense of knowing some one better and liking them more. And, which is really heartening, it shows that "C.D." readers think. *We print it, as we read it, answering back as we went.*

"I HAVE GOT AN IDEA"

"I WANT to raise three unrelated points:—

"1. Should our Lord be represented on the stage? Small children, and many simple, child-like grown-ups too, are disappointed if He does not appear. To them it is a journey without an arrival. . . . I think a Voice more fitting than a Form. . . ."

Agreed that the answer may well depend on the intellectual level both of play and audience. Yet the mental image of the Christ is very personal even to children, and it was a child of six who on being assured "Yes, darling, that window *is* a picture of Jesus," replied in a hoarsely indignant whisper, "Well, it 's not a *bit* like Him." And is a voice really less personal than a form? But our principal contributors discuss this huge question.

" 2. Ought not we members of R.D.S. to do our utmost to make it known in our locality? I recently attended an unfortunate choice of play where the young men and women in the audience were frankly restive. I tracked down the producer . . . praised his enterprise . . . but urged him to apply to R.D.S. for good material. He had never heard of it. (He was an ex-Service man at a theological training college.) *I have got an idea.* I shall order a copy of *Christian Drama* to be sent to his training college for a year, for the reading-room."

This is magnificent. Look at the trouble taken. Why didn't *we* think of doing this last time we were " restive "? (a word for which we are grateful.)

The Editor has made a mental note of the proper procedure to be followed in *every* case of restiveness: and we earnestly hope that our correspondent is not content with simply " having the idea ". *Is the copy sent?*

" 3. Here, every Good Friday, the cinema is hired and a People's Service is held with lantern slides of the Passion Story. I took my young son, as he dislikes church. Never again. Awful, mawkish Victorian artiness. Would do more harm than good. Memo.—must ask R.D.S. if it knows where good slides can be got."

Please write to Church of England Films Commission, S.P.C.K. House. It 's not our province really. But this paragraph bears out R.D.S.' contention that unless Religious Art in any form is as good as or better than secular art it is far better that there should be none.

" 4. Could not photographs be made of some really good company's production of good plays either filmed or made into slides? "

Yes; *but they wouldn't have the values for which you are looking.* This is the only point on which we wholeheartedly disagree. British commercial film companies are only just emerging from a similar misconception of the Art of the Film. Film technique is wholly different from that of the flesh-and-blood stage. Let us do all we can to avoid allowing religious films to be made on this misconceived plan.

In the last paragraph of her letter our correspondent says, " Not every church has the talent to produce first-class presentations. . . ." We think that a point of interest is latent here. Religious Drama, as R. H. Ward stresses, is a two-way traffic—both sides of the footlights. While we condemn, and with vigour, the presentation to a hostile or indifferent public, of any performance that cannot stand the severest comparisons with secular art, we are very far from wishing to limit dramatic production only to such performances. For it cannot be too often repeated that what the sincere actor learns of his faith from trying to body it forth is, at any level, worth all the labour he puts into it. And a small audience of people who know what the actors are trying to do, can help both the caste and themselves along the way. But this is quite a different matter from a public show.

NEWS OF THE OTHERS

STAR TURNS

Ireland.

Dublin Religious Drama Group.

President: The Archbishop of Dublin.

The First General Meeting of the Dublin Religious Drama Group was held on Tuesday, February 11th, at the Presbyterian Church House, 16 St. Stephen's Green. The Rev. G. O. Simms, B.D., was in the Chair, and there were about fifty people present, while apologies were received from several prevented by illness.

The meeting having been opened with prayer, the Rev. J. D. Murray gave a short talk on the object of the Group, in which he stressed the fact that it was something more than " another Dramatic Society ". Its primary aim was that of Evangelism. To this end it hoped to secure the best material from existing parish societies to put on plays expressing Christian teaching as a means of reaching those at present untouched by Church activities. The Group, he said, aimed at producing the best possible plays, with the best possible actors and technicians, all of whom it was hoped would offer their talents as a form of worship. The Group looked forward to a time when they could act as advisers to parish societies seeking help in choice of plays, production, etc., and sought the enrolment of all who were interested and either wished to learn more about the work or who could help in any of the many branches of the arts involved.

A reading of the play, *Religious Drama*, by Mrs. Brodie, was given by members of the Group, and was followed with much interest by the audience, who readily entered into the atmosphere of the piece. This gave many of the arguments in favour of Religious Drama, and showed some of the misinterpretations and difficulties met with in the working out of the ideals. A spirit of sincerity and reverence was shown in the reading, which concluded on a note of worship. This note was maintained by a short Service of Dedication held in the Chapel, which brought the proceedings to a close.

Norwich.

A few details of the work of the St. William's Players.

The objects for which this group was founded are: (1) to attempt to raise the standard of performance by a pooling of resources, and (2) to take plays to village churches which could not of themselves stage a production.

Thus, whilst we are mostly people associated with the central church of St. Peter Mancroft, Norwich, we have helpers from some five other city churches. Again, whilst we have a few older members, the players are chiefly young people and have, therefore, taken the title of St. William, a local young Saint.

For the last four years we have staged Nativity Plays, firstly in city churches and then in the surrounding countryside. We cover our expenses of the production at our city performances and are thus able to go to a country church, provided only that they cover the cost of a bus in which we travel complete with props, etc.

Our production of the York Nativity revived again this year was performed in at least three churches where plays had never been performed previously.

Our most recent production was *Christ Crucified*. This time we concentrated on performances in St. Peter Mancroft only. The play was presented with extraordinary success and attracted wide support from people of many denominations. I know that the play was witnessed not only by Anglicans, but members of the Salvation Army, Plymouth Brethren, Methodists, Baptists and Roman Catholics.

The cast of this production included no fewer than four of the city clergy (three of them incumbents). I wonder if that is unique.

As to the future, we are hoping to keep alive those productions that meet with success in order that from time to time we can respond to the many requests we receive for performances in country churches. To this repertoire we hope to add two or three new productions each year. Our only difficulty in achieving this object is that many of our young men are subject to military conscription. They do, however, take their enthusiasm with them, as on a recent occasion when we were at the last moment short of a player called away to visit a sick relative. One of our boys on leave from the R.A.F. spent the last day of his leave learning a part and the evening playing it.

Edinburgh.

Under the auspices of the Social Service Board of the Episcopal Diocese of Edinburgh, a meeting on religious drama was held in Old St. Paul's Hall on May 2nd. The *Scottish Guardian* correspondent writes:—

" ' Religious Drama is the re-creation, by actors, of the Truths of Religion and its experience. It is a challenge demanding of those who witness it sympathy and imagination,' said the Rev. Canon N. J. Cockburn, introducing the Bishop of Edinburgh and the Rev. D. G. Smith, the Youth Organizer.

" Among the benefits, said the Bishop, was the strengthening of faith of the actors themselves and the aid in the Worship and Glory of God, which the Drama afforded. ' I welcome any efforts that are made in this sort of line; it is one of those instruments which the Church can use in her vital task of making known the Gospel.'

" Mr. Smith, discussing the difficulties and opportunities, said that many parishes could not decide what type of play to perform; whether they should have a small talented cast or include as many as possible. The place of the Wayfarers, a Company sanctioned by the Social Service Board in Edinburgh, was to help such parishes and act as the incentive by touring the Diocese.

" After an interval the Wayfarers presented *The Devil in the Cathedral*, by V. A. Pearn. The scene was set in Canterbury Cathedral—and within limited space the effect was excellent—in 1943. A young airman together with some friends seeks to find the solution of a new world ; they are strengthened by the return of Anselm, Augustus and Becket from the past, while the appearance of ' the man in black ' tries to damp their hopes and preach his gospel of hate. Perhaps the hardest task fell to the three Archbishops, who carried off a long and difficult trialogue with remarkable skill."

All the Rest.

(*We thought it might interest readers to see how the local Press responds to the presentation of Religious Drama. We have, therefore, reproduced in most of the plays noted below, the notices given to the productions in local papers.*)

Southall. Those who saw the Easter-tide play *Resurrexit*, will not easily forget the profound impression it made. Suitable music, solos, lighting effects, costumes and, above all, the reverent and devotional rendering of the Gospel scenes made it the most perfect presentation seen in St. George's. Miss Dorothea Richards is to be congratulated on the success of the newly founded St. George's Religious Drama Group, and can go forward to future efforts with confidence.

Bickley. In the course of years, the Bickley and Widmore Guild of Players have presented the story of the first Good Friday and the first Easter in many different ways. For this year's production, which was entitled *The Prisoner of Hope*, they took the story of " The man born blind," and used it to focus attention on those events which, though not presented on the stage, were the real theme of the play.

The play was presented in the Church Hall, Nightingale Lane, and there were two performances, one on Maundy Thursday and one on Good Friday.

The title of the play was taken from a phrase used by the prophet Zachariah, and it was applied to " the man born blind " because in the play he was presented as one who, despite the mental imprisonment of his blindness, had nourished his mind on the Scriptures and especially on the prophecies concerning the coming Messiah.

How he lived to see—literally to see—these prophecies fulfilled was told in four scenes set in a street in Jerusalem, with a prologue at Bethlehem.

The play was well constructed for its main purpose, well produced, and, on the whole, well acted.

There was a sincere and intelligent rendering by the player who took the part of Dan (the blind man), and the character of Sarah, a lame and somewhat cynical beggar, was effectively performed. The announcement of the Resurrection was handled much more convincingly than is often the case in this sort of play, though the acting at this point was still a little too restrained.

Between the scenes there was appropriate music, mostly pieces by Bach, played by a small orchestra. As is the guild's custom, all connected with the production remained anonymous.

Blackburn. St. Paul's Dramatic Society produced John Drinkwater's *A Man's House*, " about the best-constructed and most worth-while of all the Passion plays ever written ".

A Man's House, recounting the effect of the Holy Week happenings on a typical Jerusalem family, was presented during Holy Week by an anonymous cast chosen from members of St. Paul's Dramatic Society, Blackburn.

The society has been in existence for thirteen years and has produced a Passion play each Lent. Last season's choice was *Caesar's Friend* (Dermott Morrah and Campbell Dixon).

Apart from these annual productions, the society gives at least one secular play each season and, in recent years, the policy has been to give plays of good dramatic quality involving the considerable use of electrical or other stage effects. For *A Man's House* the society made its own recordings for crowd scenes. In fact, the members of the society, including the Vicar, the Rev. G. A. Parker, have such a great interest in the special effects side of play production that they are gradually buying permanent equipment.

Bristol. Worship through art. The Guild of Cathedral Players set themselves this object when they presented *Caesar's Friend* in the nave of Bristol Cathedral, and they left no doubt to the large audience that they succeeded.

Mrs. E. F. Hullcoop, who was a war-time member of the Cathedral School teaching staff, can be proud of her production.

The play by Campbell Dixon and Dermot Morrah, is based directly on the four Gospels.

The music was specially arranged by Mr. Alwyn Surplice, and the singers were the Cathedral choristers.

G. B. F.

Cirencester. The Watermoor Players presented in Watermoor Church, a Passion play, *A Sword Shall Pierce*, written by the Provost of Southwark, the Very Rev. C. Bardsley.

The play is a straightforward narrative of the Passion of Christ, with Prologue and Epilogue and a Chorus. In the Prologue and Epilogue an attempt is made to point the relevance of the Passion (and Resurrection) to our everyday life—a good idea which, however, does not in this case come off, the Epilogue specially being a sad anticlimax. The Chorus of Four Women, on the other hand, is quite excellent, with its pungent commentary on the Passion story as it proceeds step by step.

One more point about the play—Judas Iscariot is here shown as a Zealot desiring a visible revolution so earnestly that he forces his master into such a position that He must either fight—or die. Judas, apparently, has never doubted but that Jesus will fight at the last, so that when instead He allows Himself to be arrested, Judas is utterly overcome with horror and remorse, and only then realizes that he has betrayed Jesus. It is an interesting interpretation, but it must remain a matter of conjecture whether it is the true one or not.

The production as a whole was excellent, and if it was not quite as finished as is usual with this company, this was more than counter-balanced by the obvious sincerity and reverence of the actors. Miss S. N. Perry, who, besides producing the play, was mistress of the wardrobe, deserves high praise. The dresses were in every case pleasing and in some cases really striking. "Noises off" were skilfully managed, and the shouts of the crowd sounded really menacing and never once faltered—no easy effect to achieve. The incidental music was chosen with great discernment.

Berlin. (*From an article by the Berlin Secretary of the Student Christian Movement.*)

. . . Thirdly, there are "Evangelizations". At week-ends or during the vacation a group of twenty or thirty students will go into the country and visit the villages. They invite all the inhabitants to a service or meeting at night. And apart from singing, music and the preaching of the Gospel, you will often find that a simple play is acted. Nearly always it is a story from the Old or New Testament. A play about Job or the Rich Man and Lazarus; the Rich Fool or St. Christopher; and sometimes it is a play about the Church. All these plays are in their way a proclamation of the Gospel. By this service, the student congregation becomes what every congregation has to be: an ambassador for Christ.

Correspondent, JOAN BINDEN.

Bethnal Green. St. Margaret's House Settlement, with a caste of seventy-five drawn from the various settlement groups, produced a version of *Pilgrim's Progress* based on a dramatization by H. M. Haynes, now out of print.

As the stage was too large for most of the scenes they were acted in front of an inner stage of blue curtains which was used for the scene of Vanity Fair, the Judgement Hall, the Celestial City.

The production had to be carried out with the minimum of cost, and the only stage properties were an eight-foot high wooden cross for the " Place of Deliverance ", the Wicket Gate made by the Boys' Club and the back cloth of the Gateway of the Celestial City appearing in the final scene.

The scene which involved the greatest difficulty from a production point of view was the crossing of the river, which was effected with a dark scene with spots on the Pilgrims and the shining ones. A length of black-out material was stretched across the stage about two and half feet above the level of the stage. The shining ones stood on a table of the same height at one side of the stage and behind this material, the Pilgrims climbed up steps to the top of it, and then down steps behind it, as if into the water. Although so simple a device, it was passingly effective.

Bethnal Green has unfortunately no good hall of a moderate size, so the production had to be given in the York Hall, Public Baths, which can seat 1,000 people. The acoustics are extremely bad and amplifiers had to be used. These worked well and the characters were fully audible.

Music was on gramophone records amplified, and by a local Church choir.

BARBARA MURRAY.

Orford. Four performances of Andrew Young's *Nicodemus* were given by the Orford Church Players during Holy Week, and 600 people saw the play.

This, their first production, was under the direction of the Rev. Francis Glendenning, who is Secretary to the Bishop's Advisory Committee on Religious Drama.

Owing to a cancellation of original plans, this play had only five weeks for rehearsal, but the excellence of the play itself made an increasingly deep impression on the caste as rehearsals went on, and the worth-whileness of doing a good play was evident from the way in which they responded to incessant rehearsing.

A spectator writes: " For an amateau production these points were outstanding:—

1. The presentation of the characters of Nicodemus and the Blind Man:—
   Although the main responsibility of production in this instance fell upon Nicodemus' shoulders, he played his part with freedom and care. His fears in Scene 1 were not sufficiently underlined, but otherwise it was a studied performance of considerable merit.
   The curious figure of the blind man was played through its many changes of mood with clarity, yet again without that final polish, for he fell into one of the dangers of this part—monotony of voice.
   These faults could have been remedied, like others. What is the solution to the actor-producer problem in the parochial set-up? It is far easier to condemn the situation than solve the problem.
2. The stained-glass window version of St. John was abandoned in favour of a brisk conversational young man.
3. The Constables spoke their peculiar lines in their natural Lancashire dialect which brought out the rare humour of the beginning of Scene 3.
4. The Sanhedrin scene, if wooden in individual places, was played with vigour. The plotting of this scene must have been difficult, but with a somewhat unconventional " set ", careful grouping, good dialogue and climaxes, and a simple ritual dance at the end, this telling scene was very effective.

5. Particular attention had been paid to the music and lighting.

"From the point of view of the spectator, the whole production was an excellent example of quiet synchronization and timing, where everyone, both on and off the stage, worked as a well-instructed and drilled team."

The sets were simple. The preludes were played before a traverse curtain and the change to the scenes was accomplished with a conventional slow black-out. The set for Scene 2 had been specially painted. The other two main scenes were done with careful manipulation of curtains into walls, trees, etc., in front of a cyclorama.

For this production the whole of the stage furnishing and lighting system had been renewed. Surplus ammunition boxes were reconditioned and adapted for stage use and these were used entirely for steps, thrones, chairs, rocks and tomb.

Liverpool Diocese. The first Christian Drama Festival has just been held. Competition was discouraged, though marks were given in the adjudication. The entries were not many, and were reduced to three productions for the Finals on June 7th. There was a tie for first place between Orford Church Players (with their modern dress production of *First Corinthians*, by H. F. Rubinstein) and Holy Trinity, Southport, Dramatic Club (who produced Vera Arlett's *The Keeper of the Keys*).

The adjudicator was Jessica Morris, and the standard of production was encouraging. The Bishop hopes that there will be more festivals of this kind in the future to raise the standard of drama in the Diocese.

Correspondent, Rev. F. Glendenning.

Sunderland. *St. Ignatius Drama Society.* "It was my privilege in Holy Week, to witness a presentation of the Passion play, *Behold Your King*, in St. Ignatius' Church, Sunderland, the beauty of which made a dignified setting for the play.

"Amongst the players a spirit of sincerity and reverence was in evidence throughout, and this atmosphere, quickly communicated to the audience, had the effect of uniting us in a corporate act of devotion, which good acting alone could not have done.

"Very careful attention to detail in costume, stage management and lighting, was apparent in each scene and the blending of each into such harmony brought its own reward."

Correspondent, Miss. J. Kelly.

Poole and Parkstone. *Religious Drama Centre.* The play, *Greater Love Hath No Man*, by M. Creagh Henry, was performed by the Centre at the Parkstone churches of St. Peter's, the Transfiguration and Holy Angels, at Skinner Street Congregational Church, Poole, and finally in the Regent Cinema, on Good Friday evening, at the service arranged annually by the Evangelical Council. This was the first time that religious drama has been given on this occasion. The Centre valued such an opportunity; and the Passion play seems to have impressed the audience by its great reverence and sincerity of emotion. At the church performances it was felt to be a real aid to devotional observance of the season.

Other productions have been some excellent *Passiontide and Easter Scenes*, presented by about forty children of St. Aldhelm's Sunday School; and finally, after Easter, a delightful little Franciscan play, *The Fierce Wolf of Gubbio*, done by children of the House of St. Francis', which Freda Collins, the author, came down to see.

These productions were all directed by various members of our Centre. St. Aldhelm's players are now working on a new play, *Holy Thorn*, to be done in June.

Correspondent, H. M. Richards.

Portsmouth. A Religious Drama Contest, organized by the Drama sub-committee of the Diocesan Evangelistic Council, was held in St. Mary's Parish Institute from May 8th to 10th. The purpose of this contest was expressed in the *Diocesan News*:—

" If we are to raise the standard of religious drama in this Diocese to that point at which it will not only compete with, but excel the best secular drama in the Diocese, then we must all do our best to grow and thrive upon criticism. The danger of religious drama being carried out in the parishes without any reference to the whole sphere of religious drama is that criticism is for the most part lacking. However bad the play, however bad the acting, there will always be people in the parishes who are willing to praise for the sake of being kind and not hurting other people's feelings. In this Drama Contest, however, there will be an opportunity of seeing what the Diocese can produce in the way of religious drama, and also of comparing your own views as to its standard with those of experts. Each play will receive a searching criticism, and the teams will be placed in order of merit."

An independent observer wrote to us after the " finals ":—

" The large number of entries provided evidence of a widespread interest. There were promising individual performances, and it was obvious that much hard work had been put into many of the productions; but one was left wondering, rather wistfully, how many of the plays would have held their own in an ' open ' Drama Festival. This, surely, is the decisive test: the answer would not have been encouraging.

" The winning entry, Freda Collins' *The Foolishness of God*, owed much of its success to the choice of play, a factor which, in general, had not been given sufficient consideration."

From the same Diocese comes news of another venture:—

Liss. The Liss Guilds' Passion Play ended their tour of the Diocese at H.M.S. St. Vincent's Theatre, by kind permission of the Commanding Officer. Despite the appalling weather conditions large numbers of people saw their play in every centre they visited, and everywhere they were received with gratitude. There is no doubt that spiritually their tour has done great good, and it is hoped that this will be but the first of a series of tours of the best in religious drama of all kinds. The thanks of the Diocese are due to the young players for all they put into the play, and for all the travelling undertaken in the dreadful weather conditions.

Tavistock. The Deanery Players, whose notable activities were " starred " in our last number, completed their tour of *Then Will She Return* with 36 performances to their credit, involving some 850 miles of travel; it is estimated that over 4,000 saw the play.

The experience has bound the Players into closer fellowship, increased their enthusiasm and deepened the sense of vocation in the work. Their Committee are now busy selecting the next play for production; regular play-readings will take place throughout the summer.

Etc. Other productions brought to our notice include:—

Christ Crucified: St. Matthew's, Ipswich; Down, Dromore and Connor R.D. Committee, N. Ireland; Baptist Players, Stoke-on-Trent. *A Man's House*: St. Francis Players, Welwyn G.C.; Christ Church Youth Fellowship, Salfords. *The Coronation of Christ*: St. Andrew's, Worthing; Congregational Church, Bishop's Stortford; Stoke-on-Trent. *The Upper Chamber*: St. Paul's Players, Barnstaple; Radlett Parish Church. *I Will Arise*: Stroud Parish Church. *The Sixth Hour*: St. Paul's Players, S. Harrow. *Miracle*: Parish of Chester-le-Street. *And Ye Are Witnesses*: St. Mark's Players, Reigate. *Caesar's Friend*: Bristol Cathedral Players. *Sacrifice of Isaac* and *Resurrection of Christ*: St. Anne's, Soho. *The Pilgrimage*: Red Triangle Club, Plaistow. *Medieval Passion Play*: All Saints', Poplar. *Go Down Moses*: Wesley Players, Cambridge. *Tobias and the Angel*: Westcott House, Cambridge. *Children of Galilee*:

Southampton. *A Pageant of Jerusalem*: Penrhiwceiber. *Greater Love Hath No Man*: Birmingham. *The Centurion*: Kenton. *The Passion of Christ in the Soul of Man*: S.W. 14. *Simon Peter*: Creswell Parish Players. *The Iscariot*: St. John and St. Barnabas, Belle Isle, Leeds. *Passiontide Tableaux*: Ewhurst. *The Two Pilgrims*: Bishop Auckland.

R.D.S. NEWS AND NOTICES

ANNUAL MEETING OF COUNCIL.

The Society's governing body met on June 3rd in London.

Miss Athene Seyler (unfortunately unable to preside) as Chairman, Mr. Martin Browne as Hon. Director and Mrs. J. L. Trustram as Hon. Treasurer, were re-elected to their offices, and Mr. Leonard Crainford was elected Vice-Chairman. The following are the names of the newly-elected Executive Committee, of which the Hon. Director and Hon. Treasurer are *ex-officio* members:—

Mr. Oliver Bell, Mr. E. W. Bishop, Mrs. E. Martin Browne, Miss Diana Carroll, Mr. Leonard Crainford, Miss Freda Collins, Rev. F. N. Davey, Lt.-Col. R. C. Grant, Miss Pamela Keily, Mrs. Helen Lamb, Mr. Herbert Malden, Mrs. F. Miller, Rev. J. L. Mortimer, Rev. R. Parkin, Rev. Hugh Ross Williamson, Mr. J. Seth-Smith, Miss R. Spalding, Rev. R. N. Spivey, Miss J. Weldon.

The Vice-Chairman welcomed the Hon. Director's report of the past year's progress as the most exciting in the Council's experience. The 60 per cent increase in the Society's effective membership since 1st June, 1947, was but one indication of a great step forward. After the adoption of this report and that of the Hon. Treasurer, who presented the Accounts, the Council passed a special resolution of thanks to S.P.C.K. for their great help and co-operation without which the developments of the last twelve months could not have been made.

The Council was later regaled with a most stimulating address from Hugh Ross Williamson.

(A copy of the Society's Balance Sheet as at 31st March, 1947, and the Income and Expenditure Account for the twelve months ended on that date may be seen by any member on application to the Secretary.)

SHEFFIELD.

Pamela Keily sends further stimulating news. Besides one parochial Passion-play production, and much help with others, she has given a number of talks on " R.D."—some of them far from Sheffield: in Derby and Huddersfield, at conferences in Durham and Newcastle—to local groups of varying denominations.

In Sheffield itself the major effort of this year was the production of the play commissioned by the Bishop of Sheffield for the " Church in Action " campaign: *Second Murderer*, by R. H. Ward. Mention of the play's purpose and of some of the producer's difficulties was made in the April *Christian Drama*. Knowing the producer, we were not surprised that the latter were overcome and that the former was achieved in a very remarkable presentation. The performances caused some controversy (started by a newspaper's headline, " Christ as a Miner," and maintained by some of its readers and others, not all of whom had seen the play!), but they clearly succeeded in compelling audiences to think, or think again, about their Faith and their Church.

By the time this is read another important event will have taken place: the first performance of E. R. Hougham's *Sensation on Budleigh Beacon*—a sort of "religious bank-holiday " (recently accepted by R.D.S. for publication). Of this play Miss Keily writes : " In its magnificently vulgar setting, it seems to me to present an aspect of Truth through a medium directly connected with life as it is lived here and now, and this I believe to be our very particular opportunity."

SUMMER SCHOOL.

University House, Birmingham, August 30th to September 6th.

THIS SCHOOL has been arranged for YOU: are YOU coming? and whom are YOU bringing with you? Have you really tried to make it known as widely as possible? If not, please do so at once.

The School would have been advertised many months earlier, but it took five months to find suitable accommodation and so we are inevitably late in securing bookings. We therefore look to you, our members, to help in every way so that all remaining vacancies may be quickly filled.

Perhaps our greatest need at the present time is for knowledge and imagination in the *production* of our religious plays. It is to meet this need that the School has been organized; such an opportunity of learning how to make *your* efforts worthier and more effective should not be missed. The Society has done its part in providing a brilliant team to instruct and guide you. Look at them!

Resident Staff.

Susan Richmond. Well known as an actress of stage and broadcasting, author of the excellent *A Textbook on Stagecraft*, etc., and, above all, a Producer. She was Founder-Director of the Webber Douglas School of Drama, Producer at Birmingham Repertory Theatre and now Dramatic Producer for the Royal College of Music. She will be taking production classes and rehearsing Dorothy Sayers' *He that Should Come* and is giving an important public lecture during the evening series.

Pamela Keily. Known to many of us as a great friend of the R.D.S., and organizer of last year's wonderful R.D. School at Sheffield. There for the last four years she has done brilliant work as R.D. Adviser to the Association of Christian Communities. Her pioneering in the specifically religious drama field in which she has achieved, under all sorts of circumstances, productions of outstanding value, has given her unique qualifications. She will be rehearsing part of P. J. Lamb's *Go Down Moses*.

Clive Sansom. An acknowledged expert in verse drama, choral speaking and every aspect of speech work. Examiner for the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, and Editor of *Speech of Our Time*, he will be rehearsing passages from verse plays and choruses and will give practical instruction in dramatic speech.

Doreen Woodcock. Fellow and Vice-President of the Institute of Mime. Those who came to Sheffield last year know her already as a friend and a teacher of genius. In addition to her classes of instruction and rehearsals in mime and movement she will provide one of the high-lights of the evening sessions in the form of a special lecture-demonstration.

Distinguished Visitors will give lectures to students (public admitted) throughout the week. These include **Michael Sims-Williams** (S.C.M.) on "Religion Through Drama"; **Eric Newton** (Art critic to the *Sunday Times*) on "Art and the Theatre"; **Stella Mary Pearce** (Designer for T. S. Eliot's plays) with a set of three lectures on "Designing for Religious Drama"; **Rev. F. N. Davey** (Editorial Secretary, S.P.C.K.) on "Playing with Fire from Heaven"; **Dr. Desmond MacMahon** (Musical Adviser to Birmingham Education Committee) on "The Place of Music in Drama"; **Rev. G. R. Myers, B.D.,** on "Drama as Christian Witness"; **Oliver Wilkinson** (Director of Drama, Iona Youth Trust, Glasgow) on "Experimental Drama in the Church"; **Hugh Ross Williamson** on "Problems of the Christian Playright".

Sir Barry Jackson, a Vice-President of R.D.S., hopes to be able to open the School.

This splendid programme has been prepared for YOU; what can you do but COME and reap the benefit—and get others to do likewise? Every active group affiliated to the R.D.S. should be represented at Birmingham. Several groups have set a fine example in sending one or more of their members (fees being partly paid from a group fund). *Men* are especially needed.

Application forms are available from The Organizer, Miss C. Robins, R.D.S., S.P.C.K. House, Northumberland Avenue, W.C. 2. WRITE NOW!

TWO "WAYS".

Drama Christi's presentation of Ghéon's *The Way of the Cross* in Lent and Holy Week gave hundreds of people a new experience in religious drama. The play, under the direction of Rev. Rex Parkin, was taken at a deliberately slow tempo; superb use of voices, movement, imagination and restraint in a starkly simple stylized production gave full expression to the power of this wonderful work.

The same play was given another interpretation by a group of parishioners of St. Paul's, Deptford—most of them new to acting and all of them new to this kind of drama—produced by Carina Robins. It is noteworthy that, given good direction, a deeply devotional approach, and a willingness to work hard and long, comparatively inexperienced players can tackle this unusual form and achieve results of real value.

LIBRARY.

The following have been added to our shelves since April:—

NEWLY PUBLISHED PLAYS

**Behind the Curtain.* JESSIE POWELL. Lutterworth Press. 1/6.
Three short plays based on Interludes broadcast in the B.B.C.'s Morning Service for Schools. Intended to be performed unseen. Recommended.

**Fine Linen.* H. M. RICHARDS. Muller Ltd. 3/6.
A Play for Holy Week and Easter. Recommended. (Details in Recommended List.)

Four Simple Parish Plays. PAUL GEDGE. Muller Ltd. 5/-.
These little plays, the outcome of years of dramatic work in two South London parishes, are entitled *The Brownies of Bethlehem, Desert Star, The Little Maid, The Mother of Consolation.* To those looking for a fresh approach to the story of the journey of the Magi we recommend *Desert Star. The Little Maid* tells the story of Holy Week and Easter as it might have appeared to Jairus' daughter and her friends.

John Wesley. PHYLLIS WHITWORTH. Epworth Press. 2/6.
6 m., 4 w. supers. Episodes in the life of John Wesley.

**Men of God.* SETON POLLOCK and WILFRED GRANTHAM. Gollancz. 8/6.
Six Broadcast Plays devoted to John the Baptist and five of the earlier prophets as seen through his eyes. Historical introduction and maps. Strongly recommended to play-reading groups.

Poor Man's Miracle. MARIAN HEMAR. Minerva Publishing Co.
12 m., 3 w. supers, 4 acts. In this young Polish writer's play Byeyah maintains that a statue of St. Teresa gave him her necklace for his invalid wife, who is miraculously healed. He is accused of theft and priest, doctor, magistrate, etc., try to arrive at the truth. Recommended to experienced groups.

**Story Without an End, The.* HUGH ROSS WILLIAMSON. Mowbrays. 10/6.
B.B.C. Broadcasts to Schools. A collection of short dramatized interludes covering the main events in the life of Christ and a series on the Acts of the Apostles. Strongly recommended for Readings by Youth Groups and Schools.

REPRINTS OR REPLACEMENTS

The First Legion. EMMET LAVERY. Samuel French, 1935.
11 m., novices and choir. A drama of the Society of Jesus. A fine play; good character drawing and lively dialogue. Recommended to experienced groups.
Mary Magdalene MAURICE MAETERLINCK. 8 m., 4 w. supers.
Outward Bound. SUTTON VANE. Samuel French. 6 m., 3 w.
Passing of the Third Floor Back, The. JEROME K. JEROME. Samuel French. 6 m., 6 w.
**Tidings Brought to Mary, The.* PAUL CLAUDEL. Chatto & Windus. 3 m., 3 w., choir, supers.

* Set available.

BOOKS OF REFERENCE AND GENERAL INTEREST

Conscience on Stage. HAROLD EHRENSPERGER. Abingdon-Cokesbury Press.
The author, who has had wide experience of drama in two continents, traces drama's aid to religion in the past and shows its possibilities in the Church to-day. A book both stimulating and practical. Contains a full and useful bibliography.

The Improvised Stage. MARJORIE SOMERSCALES. Pitman.
Useful suggestions for making properties and costumes.

The Poetry of T. S. Eliot. CLIVE SANSOM. Speech Fellowship. 2/2.

Attention is drawn to the following plays in the Library available in typescript:—

The Initiates. FRANCIS EVELYN. 10 m., 3 w. Voice of the Hierophant. Voice of Jesus Christ. Time A.D. 28–29. Prelude: Hall of the Mysteries at Eleusis. Scenes 1 and 2: Athens. Scene 3: Forecourt of the Temple at Jerusalem. "There were certain Greeks who came up unto the Feast. . . ."

Blinded by our Eyes. JESSIE POWELL. 7 m., 3 w. 3 Acts. The title is taken from Rupert Brook:—

> "Learn all we lacked before, hear, know and say
> What this tumultuous body now denies
> And feel, who have laid our groping hands away
> And see, no longer blinded by our eyes."

The play shows how it is given to members of an ordinary English family to partake of this transformation in their war and post-war experiences. Recommended.

New Wine. I. S. SQUIRE. 8 m., 3 w. An Easter or Whitsuntide Play in 3 Acts. Straightforward and moving, showing clearly the contrast between the bewildered despair of the disciples in Holy Week, and their calm and joyous confidence on the first Whitsunday. Recommended. To be published by M.Y.D.

Onesimus. A. T. CADOUX. (Newly-revised.) A scholarly and entertaining reconstruction of the story of the runaway slave who follows St. Paul. Characterization good : dialogue epigrammatic. Out of the ordinary. Recommended.

Then Will She Return. LESBIA SCOTT. 9 m., 7 w. 3 Acts. Recommended as a play which will bring home to audiences both the glorious heritage of the Church and the daily problems and difficulties which confront her servants in the twentieth century. To be published by R.D.S./S.P.C.K.

Many thanks are due to those members who kindly and generously sent plays in response to our appeal. We received three of those specially required : *Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus* and *Story of Christmas in Mime.* We are also grateful for gifts of plays which we already have on our shelves: in most cases the demand has exceeded the supply, and these extra copies will be very useful.

We are still anxious to fill the following gaps:—

Good Friday, JOHN MASEFIELD; *Christ Crucified,* MARGARET CROPPER; *Resurrection,* W. B. YATES; *X at Oberammergau,* HUMBERT WOLFE.

No book-binders have turned up, but the Librarian's heart has been filled with joy on certain occasions when plays, sent out in unavoidably shabby attire, have returned decently jacketed.

A PARADISE EIGHT FEET BROAD

(From " Life in the Middle Ages," by G. C. Coulton)

In 1536, the inhabitants of Bourges performed in their old Roman amphitheatre a " Mystery of the Holy Acts of the Apostles " which was perhaps the most elaborate ever recorded. It lasted forty days, and it was so admirably acted (as a contemporary historian assures us) " that the greater part of the spectators judged it to be real and not feigned ". The performance began by a procession of the 494 performers from the Abbey of St. Sulpice to the arena, in costumes which modern pageant-masters can only envy at a distance. " A demoniac, clad in green satin brocaded with golden apples, was led on a gilt chain by his father in yellow satin. A blind man and his varlet were in red and grey satin. A paralytic had a shirt of orange satin. The blind men, ' rascals ', and other beggars were clad in silk. . . . After the Apostles came disciples clad in robes of velvet, crimson satin, damask and taffeta, made in strange and divers fashions, some with embroidery and others with bands of ribbon or silk. . . . After all this devilry came a Hell fourteen feet long by eight feet broad in fashion of a rock crowned with a tower ever burning and belching flames, wherein Lucifer's head and body alone appeared . . . At the end of the procession came a Paradise eight feet broad by twelve feet long."

Everything was as realistic as possible: the flaying of St. Bartholomew was made visible by a " nudity, or carnation " which he wore under his apparent skin; to out-devil the devil, " we must have a pair of spectacles for Satan." The following extract gives the properties required for the Virgin Mary's death, funeral, and assumption.

" We must have a palm sent from Paradise for Gabriel to bring to Mary. There must be a thunder-clap in Paradise; and then we need a white cloud to come fetch and ravish St. John preaching at Ephesus, and to bring him before the door of the Virgin Mary's abode. We must have a white robe for the Virgin Mary to die in. We must have a little truckle-bed and several torches of white wax which the virgins will hold at the said Lady's death. Jesus Christ must come down from Paradise to the death of the Virgin Mary, accompanied by a great multitude of angels, and take away her soul with Him. We must have a bier to bear the said Lady's body to the tomb. We must have a tomb. There must be sent down from Paradise to the tomb aforesaid a round cloud shaped like a crown, wherein are several holy angels with naked swords and javelins in their hands; and, if it may be, we must have these living, that they may sing. We need a tomb wherein to lay the said Lady's body. God purposeth to send to our Lady's tomb, to raise her and bring her up to Paradise, body and soul. Jesus, Mary, and all the angels must mount up; and in mounting they must stay awhile here and there, even as the Orders shall speak. A cloud must cover the Apostles: then let each depart underground and go unto his own region."

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